AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1. (original) A purified nucleic acid molecule comprising the DNA sequence of SEQ ID NO:2.

2. (original) A purified nucleic acid molecule encoding an amino acid sequence comprising the sequence of SEQ ID NO:1.

3. (currently amended) A purified nucleic acid molecule encoding a vatE protein that hybridizes to either strand of a denatured, double-stranded DNA comprising the nucleic acid sequence of any one of claims 1 or 2 under conditions of high stringency.

4. (previously presented) The purified nucleic acid molecule as claimed in claim 3, wherein said isolated nucleic acid molecule is derived by *in vitro* mutagenesis from a sequence selected from SEQ ID NO:2 to NO: 15.

5. (previously presented) A purified nucleic acid molecule encoding SEQ ID NOS: 5 or 7, or degenerate from SEQ ID NOS: 6 or 8 as a result of the genetic code.

6-7. (canceled)

8. (original) A recombinant vector that directs the expression of a nucleic acid molecule of claim 3.

9. (original) A recombinant vector that directs the expression of a nucleic acid molecule of claim 4.

10-25. (canceled)

26. (original) A host cell transfected or transduced with the vector of claim 8.

27. (previously presented) A method for the production of SEQ ID NO:1 comprising culturing a host cell of claim 26 under conditions promoting expression, and recovering the polypeptide from the culture medium.

28. (original) The method of claim 27, wherein the host cell is selected from the group consisting of bacterial cells, yeast cells, plant cells, and animal cells.

29. (original) A host cell transfected or transduced with the vector of claim 9.

30. (previously presented) A method for the production of SEQ ID NO:1 comprising culturing a host cell of claim 29 under conditions promoting expression, and recovering the polypeptide from the culture medium.

31. (original) The method of claim 30, wherein the host cell is selected from the group consisting of bacterial cells, yeast cells, plant cells, and animal cells.

32. (original) The plasmid deposited at CNCM under the Accession Number I-2247.

33-41. (canceled)